Chapter 1

Introduction

The Lynchburg Fire & EMS Department (LF&EMS) has operated under stated general response time goals for many years. However, it had not developed and adopted clearly defined standards of response coverage (SORC). In 2003 a committee began working to define a SORC for LF&EMS. The effort was initiated in an effort to establish such policy, as it is an essential component to becoming an accredited fire service agency.

The Department is currently in the self-assessment phase of the accreditation process of the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). One requirement of a fire agency to receive accreditation is to prepare a SORC plan before or during the self-assessment phase of accreditation. SORC is defined as those written procedures determining the distribution and concentration of fixed and mobile resources. This process includes reviewing community expectation, setting response goals and objectives and establishing a system of measuring performance. This document will serve as a critical element of the accreditation process.

This process uses a systems approach to deployment rather than a one-size-fits-all prescriptive formula. In this comprehensive approach, LF&EMS is matching local need (risks and expectations) with the costs of various levels of service. In an informed public policy debate, City Council "purchases" the fire and EMS protection (insurance) the community needs and can afford.

If resources arrive too late or are understaffed, the emergency will continue to escalate- drawing more of the Department's resources into a losing battle. What fire departments must do – if they are to save lives and limit property damage – is arrive within a short period of time with adequate resources to do the job. To control a fire before it has reached its maximum intensity requires geographic dispersion (distribution) of technical expertise and cost-effective clustering (concentration) for maximum effectiveness against the greatest number of types of risks.

Therefore, creating a SORC consists of decisions made regarding distribution and concentration of field resources in relation to the potential demand placed on them by the type of risk and historical need in the community. Furthermore, if it is to be meaningful in the community, the outcomes must demonstrate that lives are saved and property is protected.

To clearly define SORC, the department must have a policy statement regarding how risks are categorized within the context of the City of Lynchburg. Because of the wide range of complex issues for which fire departments are held accountable, it is necessary that there is a method for identifying risks and expected outcomes. Based upon that risk assessment and anticipated workload, a SORC is developed for fire and EMS functions. It is recognized within the fire service profession that this evaluation must take into account both the frequency and severity of the most common types of incidents.

By studying five main components of the SORC systems approach defined by CFAI, LF&EMS was able to develop this document with a high degree of confidence. Those five components include:

- Existing deployment
- Risk identification
- Risk expectations
- Service level objectives
- Distribution

Studying the performance of an emergency response agency such as LF&EMS covers many areas and must address many questions, such as the following:

- What type of emergency response apparatus, with what staffing levels, should be stationed in what locations, at what hours of the day?
- What is the expected workload of each company?
- What does the demand for service in each area look like, and what are projected demands?
- What levels of service should LF&EMS provide within each emergency discipline?
- Are station response goals appropriate for service delivery capabilities?

LF&EMS will utilize this analysis to more comprehensively address a number of issues. This SORC plan will provide:

- A baseline tool for defining emergency response performance standards and goals;
- A summary of community risk (life safety, economic and environmental);
- An analysis of critical emergency scene tasks, which should assume maximum utilization of all personnel under a "worst case" scenario [This analysis should be consistent with the department's risk analysis, staffing levels and goals];
- A basis for continually measuring performance over time; and
- Guidelines for short-term and long-term policy decisions dealing with resource procurement and allocation.

The SORC is developed through the systematic evaluation of the department's present policies, practices and historical response data. The results of these analyses are then used to develop formal statements regarding the level of service the department can be expected to provide, along with recommendations to make changes in the way services are delivered for the purpose of improving the level of service to the community.

Level of service is defined as the resources needed to meet stated service level objectives. Level of service is defined only in terms of what is provided and not in terms of effectiveness or of quality.[1]

Quality of service is measured by outcomes, such as fire loss data and lives saved, and perceptions, such as those documented through community surveys. While these measures are important as indicators of quality of service, they are not part of standards of cover, and are therefore not included in this type of document.

This document and its contents will be reviewed annually to determine if the level of service and/or established goals are appropriate.

[1] *Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual,* Commission on Fire Accreditation International, Sixth Edition.

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